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ABSTRACT

A report on the results of changes in the introductory core French program summarizes three reports evaluating the effects of increasing the total amount of instructional time in French in grades 7 and 8 on students' acquisition of French language skills, attitudes, and cultural awareness. Random samples of students in four academic year grade 8 cohorts were used, and the data used included French language achievement and attitude tests, and results of the grade 7 system-wide Canadian Test of Basic Skills to ensure the representativeness of samples. Only data on students exposed to the core French program were used for statistical tests. Results indicate that increasing the amount of instructional time produced significant improvements, in varying degrees, in most aspects of students' achievement in French. Students also generally showed increasingly positive attitudes toward French Canadians and learning French and had less anxiety about active participation in their French classes. Their knowledge of the French culture had not changed significantly. (MSE)

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ELEMENTARY FRENCH CORE PROGRAM EVALUATION: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS 1978 TO 1983

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Research Report 84-04

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ELEMENTARY FRENCH CORE PROGRAM EVALUATION: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS 1978 TO 1983

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Educational Research Services
London Board of Education

Major changes in the elementary French program (Jutras & Gillin, 1976), involving both increased instructional time and shifts in emphasis, have been planned over the 1978 to 1988 decade. An evaluation plan, designed to assess the impact of these changes, has to date involved several studies (Stennett & Isaacs, 1979 to 1984). Two of the studies simply involved establishing the grade 8 and grade 11 achievement levels of the last group of London students to take the 'old' elementary French program, i.e., 20 minutes of French instruction per day in grades 7 and 8. Another study assessed the effect of additional instructional time in French on grade 8 students' achievement in English and mathematics. Three studies were designed to assess the effects of increasing the total amount of instructional time in French in grades 7 and 8 (from 120 to 180 to 240 to 360 hours) on students' acquisition of French language skills, attitudes and cultural awareness. This report provides a brief summary of these last three studies.

METHOD

Sampling

A representative, 20 percent sample of elementary schools was chosen from which, for each of the four years of the study, a random sample of 15 grade 8 classes was selected. From each of these four groups of approximately 400 students two subsamples of about 150 students were randomly selected each year to receive individually-administered tests.

Testing

All French language achievement and attitude tests, whether individual or group, were administered by specially-trained teachers in May and June of each year. Results of the system-wide administration of the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) and Dominion Test of Learning Capacity (DTLC) in grade 7 were used to ensure the representativeness of the samples and, where necessary, to make appropriate corrections in any statistical tests used to compare the performance of the four academic-year cohorts of grade 8 students.

Measuring Instruments

Reading. Students' reading skill was tested using the IEA[1] Population I Reading test, which consists of 35 multiple-choice items. For each item the student has to read a sentence in French and then choose, from among four line drawings, the one which best depicts what he has read.

Listening. Students' listening skill was tested using the IEA Population I Listening test. In this 35-item, multiple-choice test the student hears a short statement in French from a tape-recorder and then must choose, from among four line drawings, the one which depicts the message he has heard.

Speaking. Three aspects of students' ability to speak French were tested using IEA materials: *(a) Pronunciation.* In this test a student simply repeats a series of 16 sentences he hears from a tape-recorder. His tape-recorded responses are subsequently rated (correct or incorrect) in terms of the accuracy with which he pronounces 29 different elements. *(b) Structural Control:* In this test students are required to respond verbally with a single sentence in French to each of ten questions presented in French by means of a tape-recorder. Students could rely on a suitable picture for the content of their reply. Their answers were scored in terms of the accuracy of their responses and the maximum possible score is 40. *(c) Fluency.* The IEA Population I Fluency test requires the student to produce a series of sentences in response to one of two line-drawings. After viewing the picture of his choice for one minute, the student is asked to start speaking and the first 30 seconds of his response are tape-recorded. The student's response is subsequently scored using a complex formula which involves counting the number of intelligible clauses, grammatical structures, vocabulary used, etc., to give fluency quality, quantity and total scores.

Oral-Aural. These tests, designed to approximate real life situations as closely as possible, are given individually and all verbal interactions between examiner and student tape-recorded for subsequent scoring. The tests are as follows:

(a) Aural Comprehension without visual cues. In this test the student is asked nine questions in French and can give his response, scored either correct or incorrect, in English.

(b) Aural Comprehension with visual cues. In this test the student is shown a picture and asked seven questions in French to which he must respond in French. Each of his answers is scored on a three-point scale (0,1,2) so that the highest score possible is 14.

(c) Task Completion. In this test students were asked, imagining the examiner did not speak English, either to ask a question or give information in French. Students' responses were examined to yield two subscores:

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[1]International Association for the Evaluation of Education Attainment. For the final group of students (360 hours of instruction) the more difficult IEA Population II test had to be used because of ceiling effects observed with the Population I test.

(i) The *Communication* score was simply the number of items the student completed satisfactorily enough to be understood...regardless of the adequacy of his French grammar, pronunciation, etc. (Total possible score is 11.)
(ii) The *Structure* score was calculated by simply counting the total number of relevant structures present in the student's responses.

Cultural Awareness. The Survey of French Cultural Awareness, developed in Ottawa, is a 30-item multiple-choice test which assesses a student's knowledge of various aspects of the French culture...internationally, in France, in Canada and in Quebec.

Attitudes. Students' attitudes were assessed using three different tests: Attitude Toward French Canadians (10 items), Attitude Toward Learning French (10 items), and French Class Anxiety (5 items). All of the items required an agree-disagree response on a 7-point Likert-type scale.

RESULTS

Table 1 gives the average or mean scores on all of the tests for the grade 8 classes of 1977-78, 1978-79, 1980-81 and 1982-83, i.e., for students who have had 120, 180, 240 and 360 hours of French instruction.[2]

Column 5 of Table 1 gives the differences in mean score between the students who had 120 and 360 hours of instruction. Column 6 gives these same values expressed in standard deviation (S.D.) units. In general, a change of .25 S.D. units is considered to be educationally significant. The last column in Table 1 gives the results of tests of the statistical significance of the difference among the mean scores of the four cohorts of students. In this column the value $<.01$ means that the chance of observing a difference between the means as large as the one obtained is less than 1 in 100; n.s. means that the observed difference is not statistically significant.

A review of the data contained in Table 1 reveals the following trends:

(1) Students have shown considerable improvement in their reading skills. In fact, the IEA Population I test is 'too easy' for students who have had 240 or more hours of instruction. Their real achievement in reading is, therefore, even better than that indicated in Table 1.

(2) Students have shown a modest irregular improvement in their listening skills.

(3) Students' speaking skills have improved, especially in structural control and the quantity of their productions.

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[2]Students who had either more or less instruction than that provided by the London program were not included in this analysis.

TABLE 1 Summary of Average Test Scores for the Grade 8 Classes of 1977-78 1978-79, 1980-81 and 1982-83.

Tests	Maximum Possible Score	Mean Scores by Cohort			Diff. 77-78 & 80-81 Means in....		ANOVA or ANCOVA Test (3 cohorts)
		77-78	78-79	80-81	Raw Score Units	S.D. Units	
Reading	30	22.23	26.06	26.80*	4.57	.83	<.01
Listening	30	15.99	18.05	17.26	1.27	.29	<.01
Speaking:							
- Pronunciation	29	17.85	16.74	17.64	-.21	-.06	n.s.
- Structural Control	40	3.30	7.32	6.55	3.25	.62	<.01
- Fluency: Quantity	--	12.11	16.12	20.51	8.40	.63	<.01
Quality	--	12.13	11.86	15.05	2.92	.39	<.01
Total	--	24.34	28.05	35.61	11.27	.60	<.01
Aural-Oral:							
Aural Comprehension:							
- Without Visual Cues	9	2.09	2.92	3.75	1.66	.79	<.01
- With Visual Cues	14	3.16	3.99	5.10	1.94	.69	<.01
Task Completion:							
- Communication	11	3.84	5.27	6.64	2.80	.96	<.01
- Structure	--	16.04	20.38	21.95	5.91	.70	<.01
Cultural Awareness	30	13.85	13.85	14.27	.42	.12	n.s
Attitudes:							
Toward French Canadians	70	43.5	43.4	46.2	2.7	.23	<.01
To Learning French	70	39.8	41.6	41.9	2.1	.12	n.s
French Class Anxiety	35	20.1	18.9	18.5	-1.6	.23	<.05

*Adjusted Means; 82-83 Cohort not included in ANOVA test because they took a different test.

(4) In terms of the aural-oral skills involved in successful interpersonal communication students have shown very marked improvement with increased instruction.

(5) Students' knowledge of the French culture has not improved.

(6) Students' attitudes toward French Canadians and toward learning French, both initially fairly positive, have become slightly more so and their anxiety about active participation in French classes has lessened significantly.

In general, it is quite clear that the increased instructional time allocated to the elementary French program has produced significant improvement in almost all aspects of students' mastery of the language.

FUTURE STUDIES

The current evaluation plan calls for assessments of the impact of changes in the French program at the following key points: (a) when students who have had 40 minutes per day since grade 6 reach grade 11, (b) when students who have completed the grade 8 immersion program reach grade 11, and (c) when students who elect the secondary-level extended program reach grade 11.

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